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AUTHOR Perry, Leland M.
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ABSTRACT

The Soviet Union has embarked upon a five-year plan to improve education at all levels. Some of the major aspects of the reform movement include: (1) improving the status of teachers by providing salary increases from 25 to 35 percent and trying to entice more men to enter teaching; (2) trying to increase the birthrate by emphasizing preschool education and providing paid maternity leave for two months before and after the birth of the child; (3) changing the age of entrance to the primary school from seven to six; (4) emphasizing vocational training at the secondary school level by combining a secondary education with vocational training; (5) improving textbooks by revising them every five years; and (6) increasing the quality of teaching by improving teacher education in the Pedagogical Academy. Other aspects of the USSR educational system discussed are: the middle school, special education programs, bilingual education, grading, pedagogical academics, discipline, and student motivation. (APG)

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SCHOOL REFORM IN THE USSR

by

Leland M. Perry
Professor of Teacher Education
California State University, Long Beach
1250 Bellflower Blvd.
Long Beach, CA 90840
Department Phone: (213) 498-4506

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SUMMARY

The Soviet Union has embarked upon a new five-year plan to improve education at all levels. This article discusses several aspects of the school reform movement. Some of the major aspects of the reform movement include:

1. Improving the status of teachers by providing a raise in salary of from 25 to 35 percent and by trying to entice more men to enter teaching.

2. Trying to increase the birth rate by giving greater emphasis to preschool education and by providing paid leaves for mothers two months before and two months after the birth of the child.

3. Changing the age of entrance to the primary school from age seven to age six.

4. Emphasizing vocational training at the secondary school level by combining getting a high school diploma with getting a job.

5. Improving textbooks by revising them every five years.

6. Introducing computer literacy at the eighth grade level.

7. Increasing the quality of teaching by improving teacher education in the Pedegogical Academy.

Other aspect of the school reform discussed in this article are: the middle school, special education, bilingual education, grading, discipline, and pedegogical academies.

SCHOOL REFORM IN THE USSR

INTRODUCTION

Within the last year in the United States there have been more than a dozen major reports suggesting reforms in the educational system at all levels. It is interesting to note that other major countries are also in the process of reforming their educational system. The Soviet Union has embarked on a bold five-year plan to improve education at all levels. Their School Reform movement is an attempt to update the educational system for the 1990s. Recently my wife and I took a Phi Delta Kappa sponsored educational tour to Leningrad, Tashkent, Samarkand, and Moscow. We had the opportunity to visit several schools and to talk with many individuals about their views of schooling at different levels. The following is a summary of the major aspects of school reform in the USSR as we understand them.

STATUS OF TEACHERS

One of the most important aspects of School Reform in the Soviet Union is the improvement of the teaching profession. Every teacher has already received a 25 to 35 percent across the board raise in their salary. Special efforts are being made to recruit more men into teaching because most of the teachers are women. Also, every teacher will be given compulsory refresher courses lasting from three to six months, all expenses paid, every five years. Along with a raise in pay, teachers are to be given special paid vacations, better medical treatment, and improved living accommodations.

PRESCHOOL

Over 90 percent of the women in the USSR work. Thus, there is a great need for preschool education. Since the Soviet government wants to raise the birth rate, women are given paid leaves from their job for two months before the birth of a baby and two months after. Preschool education is provided for children up to three years of age for a small fee.

KINDERGARTEN

The people of the USSR take pride in their kindergartens. Parents pay 20 percent of the cost. Pupils stay in kindergarten from 3 to 7 years old. Next year as a part of the Reform Movement, pupils will start to the primary school at the age of six. School is in session six days per week made up of 24 to 45 minute lessons to 15 to 20 children in music, drawing, Russian language, and one foreign language selected from English, German, or French. Each kindergarten class is taught by one teacher and an assistant. The school is staffed by a director, a doctor, nurse, music teacher, a drawing teacher, a cook and service personnel. The children receive three meals a day. They are provided various physical experiences including games.

PRIMARY SCHOOL

The primary school is an extension of the kindergarten with the same kind of philosophy. Starting at the age of six, pupils study more academic subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics, science and languages. Primary teachers are trained in special pedagogical schools that specialize in this level of teaching. There are 229 teacher training institutes in the USSR.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

The middle school starts with class four (fourth grade). Pupils have certain classes each day, six days a week, in a departmentalized setting. They are required to take at least 18 hours of instruction each week. Each class is composed of 30 to 40 students each seated at an assigned desk or table from which they are not allowed to move during the lesson. They must complete homework each evening. A typical class starts with a test on the homework, then review of the test with questions answered, new material is then presented, and a assignment is given. Lessons are 45 minutes in length. After school, called the "prolonged day," students may stay for extra classes and for help on homework. Teachers teach 30 lessons per week for full salary. They get paid extra for extra duties. In addition to the regular classes, pupils are provided with a planned field trip the last school day of each month.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

All children except the ones with severe physical disabilities and those who are extreme mentally retardation attend the same school and take the same classes. Special schools are provided for the physically handicapped and for the mentally retarded in most cities. If a physician determines the need for such a school and one is not available where the parents live, they will be relocated in a city where one is available. There is no ability grouping. The slower children are given longer to learn and the bright pupils are available to assist them as they learn.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Bilingual education is a real challenge in the USSR. There are over 100 different languages represented in the various regions. Where Russian is not the primary language, pupils are taught in their native language until the age of 8 and then taught Russian as a second language. At the age of 11 each pupil is required to study another foreign language. It is the goal of the USSR to have every citizen literate in the Russian language by 1990.

COMPUTER LITERACY

It is planned to introduce computer education at the eighth grade level. Instruction will be given in word processing, logic and in programming in various languages. The Soviet government plans to put 1 million computers into the 60,000 secondary schools by 1990, but due to shortages of hardware, personnel to teach teachers how to use the computers, and lack of appropriate software this goal is will be almost impossible to attain.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

All pupils receive the same basic education through the 7th grade, except for special instruction in music, dance, skating, science, etc. After the age of 14, students are screened by desire and by tests into one of three types of schools--vocational, professional, or general education.

VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

Great emphasis is placed on vocational training which is designed to provide students with both a secondary education and

vocational training in one of the trades needed in the country. Students enrolled in a trade school are provide, free of charge, their room, board, clothes, transportation and education. Along with the standard secondary school subjects of Russian language, literature, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, history and foreign language (English, French or German), each student studies the theory behind the particular trade selected. As a part of their training each student is required to work in their trade in the community for which they are paid. Fifty percent of what they earn is given to the school for expenses.

DISCIPLINE

There are discipline problems in the schools of the Soviet Union. As they say "Our kids are not angels." Girls are becoming more militant. Corporal punishment is forbidden. What is most often used is "friendly persuasion." If that doesn't work, then the student is kept after school. If needed the student is required to see the Headmaster. Each student is required to keep a record book of disciplinary actions. If the student continues to be a disciplinary problem, the parents are asked to come to the school for a conference. As a last resort, the school contacts the employer of the parents. In extreme cases, the student is placed in a special school.

GRADING

Every student is graded on a five-point scale: 5 - Excellent; 4 - Good; 3 - Satisfactory; 2 - Poor, and 1 - Very poor. Very poor is used very infrequently, perhaps in only on in every 1000 marks.

PEDEGOGICAL ACADEMIES

There are 17 branch Academies of Pedegogical Sciences under the Minister of Public Education each specializing in a different aspect of teaching. Most teachers are trained on one of these institutions of higher education. Admission is by examination and the number admitted is based upon the projected number of teachers needed in each field for the year of graduation. Students go to class six days per week over a four-year period. When they graduate each is provided with a teaching position.

UNIVERSITY

Some teachers are trained by universities, but the university emphasizes the study in depth of a discipline whereas the teacher training institutions emphasize both subject matter preparation and dedagogy which is preferred in the USSR.

MOTIVATION

One of the major problems in the USSR, as we see it, is viewed by that country as one of their major advantages. Work is guaranteed. Regardless of how well one does in school, each person is assured of a job, free medical treatment, almost free education (small fee for books), and housing accommodations at a very small cost. (Only 3 percent of ones salary.) As a result the major factor of motivation that encourages students to do well in school is missing from the educational system in the USSR.